

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore
Pre-Ice Caves FAQ's (frequently asked questions)
Updated 2-3-15

What are the Ice Caves?

There are intricately carved sea caves in cliffs along the Mainland Unit of Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. As ice forms on Lake Superior, waves splashing against the rock freezes on the sandstone cliffs. In addition, water seeping between sandstone rock layers freezes to form a variety of features similar to limestone caves. There are often large icicles and formations hanging off of the cliffs, curtains and columns of ice, and abundant ice crystals.

When will the caves be accessible?

It is hard to say. This year, the ice didn't form in a solid sheet, but was composed of "pancake" ice that was blown into shore and frozen. This type of ice isn't as solid and a combination of warm weather and waves blew out the ice by the caves over the weekend of January 17 and 18. It is currently open water near the caves. Calm cold conditions could result in ice along the caves yet this winter, but may not. The park monitors the ice conditions in this area.

Can I go out before the NPS officially opens access to the caves?

Yes, but it is not recommended. Going out on untested ice is very dangerous and hypothermia is a serious threat. Cell coverage is also very poor in the area of the ice caves. You put yourself and potential rescuers at significant risk.

Where can I get the most up-to-date information?

You can check our Facebook page www.facebook.com/apostleislandsnationallakeshore. Facebook enables the park to quickly provide up-to-date information.

You can call the Apostle Islands Ice Line at 715-779-3397 ext. 3.

Or you can visit the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore (www.nps.gov/apis) and Bayfield Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau (www.bayfield.org) websites.

How unusual was last year's ice cave season?

The number of people that visited the ice caves was multiples higher than any other year and the resulting economic impact to the local communities was unprecedented. The visitation in 2014 was 138,000, compared to 8,400 in 2009, even though the length of time the ice caves were accessible was similar during both years. The economic impact of the ice caves to the local region in 2014 was estimated to be between \$8 and \$10 million.

Will there be a fee for visiting the ice caves?

Yes. If the ice caves are accessible, there will be a \$5/person/day fee for those 16 and older for those visiting the caves, regardless of access point or method. The fee is waived for children under the age of 16. There will also be an annual pass available for \$10. The pass is only available at Park Headquarters in Bayfield (415 Washington Ave.) during the Ice Cave Event. There are no other discounts for this special recreation permit fee. Holders of the Interagency Annual, Access, or Senior passes must still pay the full amount. During the rest of the year, outside of the Ice Cave Event, there is a \$3/car parking fee at Meyers Beach.